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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000149

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E  
AFRICOM AND CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD  
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2034-02-26  
TAGS: PREL PTER PINS PINK MOPS DJ SO ER  
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI FM CALLS FOR INCREASED SURVEILLANCE TO THWART  
SUSPECTED ERITREAN ARMS SHIPMENTS TO SOMALIA

CLASSIFIED BY: Eric Wong, Charge d'affaires, a.i., U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy, Djibouti; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (C), (D)

11. (S) SUMMARY. In a February 26 meeting with interim Charge, Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali Youssouf requested USG assistance in strengthening surveillance of airspace between neighboring Eritrea and Somalia, to interdict or curb suspected arms shipments from Asmara to unspecified airfields near Kismayo. Youssouf said he would make the same request to the Government of France. Youssouf expressed concern about recent rising insecurity in Mogadishu: having failed to stop the Djibouti peace process in Djibouti, al-Shabaab elements now sought to derail peace in Somalia. Of particular concern to the GODJ was the vulnerability of the Somali cabinet members and over 300 parliamentarians, who were due to depart Djibouti later in the day for Somalia. Increased Eritrea-Djibouti border tensions were yet another justification for increased border surveillance, he said. FM Youssouf deferred to "technical experts" to determine the best means of conducting such surveillance, but said he had no objection to using UAVs in Djibouti for surveillance. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) According to Youssouf, the GODJ was deeply concerned about the security situation in Mogadishu. The GODJ suspected that Somali insurgents (i.e., al-Shabaab) were being regularly supplied with unspecified arms by several sources, including by Eritrea. Specifically, he asserted that Antonov aircraft carrying arms and ammunition from Asmara were landing in southern Somalia, at airstrips outside Kismayo. The GODJ was working with the new government of Somalia led by President Sheikh Sharif to identify suspected airfields, he said. Youssouf said the GODJ suspected that small aircraft--unless entering Ethiopian airspace--likely refueled in northern Somalia, en route between Asmara and southern Somalia, a flight that took approximately three hours. Eritrea had smuggled arms to Somalia during Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia, he said. Such channels of supply needed to be disrupted, to reduce the threat of al-Shabaab terrorist attacks on AMISOM or Government of Somalia troops.

13. (C) In addition, Youssouf asserted that arms were also being smuggled across the "porous border" between Somalia and Ethiopia, with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) collaborating with insurgent forces targeting AMISOM.

14. (C) Citing a "dramatic increase in violence" in Mogadishu in the previous two days, FM Youssouf said the next few days would be decisive for the political future of Somalia. President Sharif had returned to Somalia (from Djibouti) on February 23; three aircraft carrying the remainder of the new Somali cabinet, as well as 300 members of parliament, were due to depart Djibouti on February 26. "Terrorist forces" seeking to block Somali political reconciliation and thwart the Djibouti Process through "violent reaction" needed to be defeated, Youssouf said.

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NEED FOR STRENGTHENED SURVEILLANCE OF BORDER  
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15. (C) Commenting on Charge's remarks that previous Eritrean support of Somali insurgents had been a factor in the USG's formal designation of Eritrea as a country "not fully cooperating on counter-terrorism," FM Youssouf said Djibouti's goal was not to see Eritrea designated as a state sponsor of terror, but rather to interdict Eritrean arms in order to improve the security situation in neighboring Somalia. Increased surveillance would make it difficult for Eritrea to continue such shipments, he said.

16. (S/NF) In response to Charge's comment that increased surveillance of airspace could be achieved through various means, possibly including UAVs, FM Youssouf responded that the GODJ had no objection to the deployment of UAVs in Djibouti to conduct surveillance, which he said could also be used for counter-piracy operations. Citing continued tension on the Eritrea-Djibouti border--and Eritrea's recent rejection of AU mediation, as the 5-week deadline imposed by UNSCR 1862 has expired--FM Youssouf highlighted the need for increased surveillance of Djibouti's borders. FM Youssouf said he deferred to technical experts as to whether such surveillance required using drones, radar, or satellite imagery; the key point for the GODJ was that surveillance needed to be strengthened.

17. (S/NF) Acknowledging the sensitivity of publicly attributing any significant operational military activity--apart from security capacity-building--to the U.S. military forces at Camp Lemonier, FM Youssouf underscored that any such activity would be extremely close-hold and confidential.

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INSECURITY ON TWO FRONTS  
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18. (S/NF) COMMENT. Separate meetings between GRPO and Djiboutian security contacts suggest that the GODJ unfortunately does not/not have new information on Eritrean arms shipments to Somalia. Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister's comments highlight that Djibouti's most significant external security concerns are its neighbors, Eritrea and Somalia, and potential linkages between

these two arcs of insecurity are thus of even greater concern to Djiboutian principals. Since at least May 2008, Djibouti has been hosting UN-sponsored peace talks on Somalia, to the consternation of Eritrea who hosted a rival extremist wing of the ARS. Today's departure from Djibouti of the remainder of Somalia's new cabinet, as well as of over half of Somalia's parliament, comes at the same time that Djiboutian officials are marking the end of the 5-week UNSC-imposed deadline for Eritrean troops to withdraw from its occupation of Djiboutian territory at Ras Doumeira. With the situation at the Djibouti-Eritrea border remaining static, there appears to be little hope of reversing the Eritrean encroachment, which the Djiboutian Foreign Minister first raised with U.S. and French officials almost one year ago. On the other hand, the formation of the new Somali government offers hope for peace in Djibouti's southeastern neighbor. Some international officials are not so sure; UNHCR has prepared contingency plans (septel) for up to 15,000 Somali refugees crossing into Djibouti, if conflict in southern Somalia expands. END COMMENT.

WONG

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